



Children's Trust Fund

450 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

The **Children's Trust Fund** is a state agency created solely for the purpose of preventing child abuse and neglect. The Trust Fund supports local efforts that help families and communities be responsive to children, ensuring their positive growth and development.

For more information, contact
Karen Foley-Schain, Executive Director,
at (860) 418-8761.

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Network Expansion Provides Families With New Hope

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Brighter Futures Initiative. Seven of the eight new Hartford sites are Brighter Futures Family Centers. The eighth site is the City's Maternal Infant and Outreach Program, a cornerstone of Mayor Eddie Perez's Passport to Success program.

"Families in Hartford will be the real winners in this collaboration," said Michael Bangser, president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. "Connecting Nurturing Families staff with family centers gives parents a comfortable, known place to go right in their neighborhood - a place where they can receive other valuable services for themselves and their children."

"School readiness is a critical issue and preventive programs such as the

Nurturing Families Network address this issue while promoting safe environments for our children," said Mayor Perez. "I'd like to thank the Children's Trust Fund, Sen. Harp, Rep. Thompson, Rep. Farr and the Hartford Foundation for making a real difference in the lives of Hartford families."

Working with residents throughout city neighborhoods, the Nurturing Families Network engages and supports 5,000 parents each year before their first child is born through intensive home visiting, group-based parent education and information/support.

Studies by the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research indicate that parents in the program

make significant gains in education, employment and self-sufficiency; spend more time with their children; and become more sensitive to their children's needs.

Following January's expansion, the program will be available through 33 sites or agencies, including 23 of the state's 29 birthing hospitals (a complete list of new sites is included in this report).

Of the approximately 2,200 children born in Hartford each year, some 800 are first-born children, including 500 in low-income households at-risk for child abuse and neglect. Nearly 50 percent of first-born children, and 70 percent of first-born/at-risk children, will be served by the Hartford expansion.

Nurturing Families Network

A Special Report of the Children's Trust Fund

December, 2004

AN INTERVIEW WITH SEN. TONI HARP

Nurturing Program An Investment in Connecticut Families



Toni Harp is currently serving her sixth term as Connecticut State Senator from the 10th Senatorial District cities of New Haven and West Haven. One of the legislature's most respected leaders, Senator Harp serves as Senate Chair of the budget-writing Appropriations Committee and in this role, was instrumental in crafting and passing legislation enabling the expansion of the Nurturing Families Network. The Children's

Trust Fund recently spoke with Senator Harp about this important initiative on behalf of Connecticut's children and families.

Q Senator Harp, looking back upon your career it seems that children's issues have always been very close to your heart. Why are children's issues so important?

A I think that children are like an unpainted canvass, and we have an opportunity to nurture and guide them so that ultimately what they do with their lives is positive and productive.

Q Talk about your support of the Nurturing Families Network and why this program stands out.

A My involvement really came about as a collaboration with (State Representative) Jack Thompson. Jack was always talking about the program and how it had the potential of reducing child abuse, and he inspired me to get excited about it. He and I were co-chairs of the subcommittee on Human Services that funds such programs, and every year when we were chairing it - he still does - we made progress and expanded it to more and more hospitals. So I'm very proud of that. The

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Network Expansion Provides Families With New Hope

The Nurturing Families Network, a program that assists high-risk, first-time parents with the challenges of parenthood, will expand from three to 11 sites in Hartford in January, thanks to \$1.8 million in increased state funding and further support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

The state funding also provides for new sites in Bridgeport and Putnam.

The landmark expansion of the Network, a State of Connecticut Children's Trust Fund program, will provide intensive home visiting parenting services to nearly three of every four first-born children in Hartford at risk for abuse and/or neglect.

It is hoped that the program will boost the city and state's ongoing efforts to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, build healthy, nurturing

environments for children and help prepare them for future success.

"This is smart money," said State Senator Toni Harp (D-New Haven), who along with Rep. Jack Thompson (D-Manchester) and Rep. Bob Farr (R-West Hartford) played a key role in passing the funding legislation. "If we can prevent child abuse and teach young parents how to nurture their children through intensive intervention, what we are really doing is creating a community for generations to come."

Bolstering the state aid is a three-year, \$429,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's

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"What we are really doing here is creating a community for generations to come"

- Sen. Toni Harp

Nurturing Program An Investment in Connecticut Families *(continued from page 1)*

Nurturing Families Network is a program that certainly, at least from an evaluation standpoint in our state and other states, has been proven to work, to change outcomes for parents and children.

Q As you've become familiar with the program and the work it does, have you gotten a sense of how important it can be to the young parents it serves?

A I can really relate to these young women who often don't have the skills they need to really work with their babies. Not to mention all the other societal pressures that being poor and at risk bring - it's extremely difficult. I know that if I was a mother in those circumstances, I would welcome this kind of help. The program reminds me of the old days when, although we seemed to have less money, we did so much

more. After a mom had her baby there would be a visitation by nurses and people from the hospital, and everyone had extended families to help out. Today's society discourages the extended families that helped people in the past. I think for a disadvantaged, at-risk young mom, it's good to have this opportunity to learn how to properly care for a child.

Q Why did you choose to support a concentrated expansion of the program in Hartford?

A The state's largest caseloads of child protection and neglect cases exist in our major cities, and Hartford is at the top of the list. Hartford has an overwhelming need for this kind of program. So I thought, well, why don't we ramp up the program as much as we can to try to really make a difference in Hartford? This is one of the

most unique, innovative, outcome-oriented programs that we have in the state; let's give it a chance to really work. At some point, if we can show that this works, then we can expand it to more cities and more families. We can attack this issue where we have the biggest problems in our state, try to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and really develop a cultural change. I am excited and full of hope that we will create a real change on behalf of children and families.

Q The foundation of the Nurturing Families Network is its preventive approach - intercepting crises before they occur. Talk about the importance of a preventive approach.

A Well, I think that particularly when it comes to child abuse and neglect, it only makes sense to put systems in place, if we can, to prevent it in the first place. Trying to solve the problem once it starts to exist is so difficult, and the damage it does to a child over the span of a lifetime can be devastating. If we can prevent this from ever occurring, it is far more productive for the child, the family and society as a whole. In my mind, this investment in the Nurturing Families Network is smart money; pay a little now, or pay a lot later. I look at our prison system, and here we have so many people who were abused as children. We are paying \$50,000 a year for each of these prisoners. To me, it makes so much sense to invest in our children and families today, to prevent these problems before they happen. Some may say our expectations are too high, but I don't think so. If we can teach young people how to be good parents through this intensive intervention, what we are really doing is creating a community for generations to come. It's a good investment.

Q What are your hopes for the future of this program and Connecticut's efforts to assist children and families?

A I truly hope that we are moving in a direction where we really embrace prevention, and programs such as the Nurturing Families Network, as tools to eliminate child abuse and to help build our families. We've got to find ways to replicate the extended families of days gone by for the overall survival of our communities. In the future we should dismiss short-term solutions and look more toward prevention and intervention programs that really help society in the long term.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE Collaboration Aids Hartford Families

Studies show that a parent's influence far surpasses any other in a child's life.

That's why the State of Connecticut Children's Trust Fund works with parents early to prevent child abuse and neglect. Likewise, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Brighter Futures Initiative focuses on family support as one critical way to increase the school readiness of Hartford's young children.

The Foundation's collaboration with the Trust Fund to help the expansion of the Nurturing Families Network will pay dividends for Hartford families for years to come, said Children's Trust Fund Executive Director Karen Foley-Schain.

"The Brighter Futures Initiative and the Nurturing Families Network are natural partners," said Foley-Schain. "This is a wonderful opportunity to build safe, healthy homes for Hartford children and give them the chance to succeed in school and beyond."



Thompson, Farr Support Nurturing Bill

Legislators often spend long hours weighing the merits of state human service programming versus the reality of budget constraints, and must make difficult decisions about appropriating funding. That's why the Connecticut legislature's authorization of \$1.8 million in increased state funding earlier this year for the expansion of the Nurturing Families Network is so significant. Playing key roles along with Senator Toni Harp in championing this legislation were Rep. Jack Thompson (D-Manchester) and Rep. Bob Farr (R-West Hartford).

"The wonderful thing about the Nurturing Families Network is that it has a demonstrated track record of success," said Rep. Thompson, one of the legislature's leading advocates for Connecticut children and families. "I'm pleased that we have the opportunity to continue to grow this worthwhile initiative."

"It is always a privilege to support programs that not only work but directly and positively impact lives," added Rep. Farr. "We are hopeful that this



State Representative Jack Thompson (D-Manchester)



State Representative Bob Farr (R-West Hartford)

expansion of the Nurturing Families Network will help hundreds of children and families throughout Connecticut."

The new state funding will be made available to the Children's Trust Fund through the Department of Children and Families.

Nurturing Families Network New Program Sites

Bridgeport
Bridgeport Child Guidance Center
in collaboration with St. Vincent's Medical Center

Hartford
Asylum Hill Beat the Street/Catholic Charities
El Centro de Desarrollo y Reafirmacion Familiar/Catholic Charities
LIFE Family Center/Liberty International Family and Educational Services
Maternal Infant and Outreach Program/ City of Hartford
Parkville Family Center/Family Life Education
RAMBUH Family Center/Village for Families and Children
Southside Family Center/Catholic Charities
Trust House Family Center

Putnam
Day Kimball Hospital

* Additional existing program sites are located in Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, Lower Naugatuck Valley (Derby & Milford), Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain (2), New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Sharon, Stamford, Torrington, Vernon/Rockville, Waterbury (2) and Willimantic.